

30 Arrested-6 From Mitchell-for Synthetic Drugs

Written by Steve Frank
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Three separate criminal indictments and a criminal complaint charging 30 men and women with conspiracy to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute synthetic drugs and related charges have been unsealed in U.S. District Court, announced Anne M. Tompkins, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina. The indictments and criminal complaint are the result of joint local, state and federal investigations into head shops operating in Mecklenburg, Buncombe, Henderson, Transylvania and Mitchell Counties. According to filed court documents and court proceedings, the head shops sold synthetic drugs, such as synthetic marijuana, commonly referred to as "K2" or "Spice" and/or synthetic cathinones, commonly referred to as "Bath Salts." The federal indictments and the criminal complaint remained sealed until the named defendants were arrested by law enforcement over a two-day period. Pandora's Dreams Smoke Shop in Mitchell county led to a criminal indictment that charged seven defendants with conspiracy to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute a quantity of a mixture and substance containing a detectable amount of synthetic drugs and related charges. The release said Bath Salts were sold at Pandora's Dreams head shop in Spruce Pine, under brand names such as "White Water Rapids", "Snowman", "Super Glass Cleaner", "Anti Monkey Butt Powder", "Dragon", and "Bushman's Repellant." The named defendants are:

- Kelly Higgins, age 24, of Burnsville, N.C.
- John Newberry, age 40, of Spruce Pine, N.C.
- Albert Tomes, age 41, of Bakersville, N.C.
- Tina Tomes, age 43, of Bakersville.
- Kevin Vickers, age 22, of Bakersville.
- Lori Watts, age 46, of Spruce Pine.
- Matt Davis, age 32, of Charlotte.

Newberry, Watts, Albert Tomes and Tina Tomes are also charged with selling or offering to sell drug paraphernalia, such as glass pipes, intended for use in inhaling a controlled substance. Matt Davis and Tina Tomes are also charged with money laundering. The indictment includes a notice of forfeiture, which gives notice that the defendants must forfeit to the United States all of the property, currency and monetary instruments involved in the offenses charged in the indictment, and all property, currency and monetary instruments which are proceeds of such offenses, including over \$45,000 in cash, a vehicle, and a firearm seized during the course of the investigation. Mitchell County Sheriff Donald Street said, "Our local head shop was creating a real nightmare for our county and was destroying many people's lives along the way."